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ILLEGAL DRUGS TRADE

"Narcotics and organized crime are the major threats to the world in the next century," says Under-Secretary-General Pino Arlacchi, Executive Director of the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. Mr. Arlacchi talks about his ideas for winning the war on drugs within ten years.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The most important branch of the criminal market is the global drug trade. While much of production flow still comes from Asia and Latin America and is ultimately destined for western consumption, this is no longer exclusively true. The lines have begun to blur. Traditional consumer countries like the United States now also produce sizable proportions of the illegal drugs they consume. And traditional drug producing countries like Pakistan and several others are now wrestling with problems of addiction.

Our guest today is Under-Secretary-General Pino Arlacchi, Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. Joining me to talk with Mr. Arlacchi is Ian Williams of *The Nation* and Betsy Pisik of *The Washington Times*.

Mr. Arlacchi, welcome to World Chronicle.

ARLACCHI: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Under-Secretary-General, understandably, people in the United Nations, including yourself, always like to accentuate the positive but there is some disappointment on the part of, particularly of the Non-Governmental Organizations, with the results of the Drug Conference in New York in June 1998 and I wonder whether you feel that it really lived up to your expectations.

ARLACCHI: It was a very important event, completely successful. For the first time the world has a strategy, the world has a target for the next ten years about demand and supply of narcotics. All countries agreed to a strategy to substantially reduce demand all over the world and also the production of illicit drugs. In the case of opium and coca, we do not speak about reduction, we speak about elimination of this narcotic drugs and we believe this is quite feasible. Of course somebody will not agree and will criticize but the worst enemy in my opinion is not this. It is cynicism. It is pessimism. It is a kind of skeptical attitude towards all the problem and during this year, thanks also to the Special Session, we are going to overcome this skepticism. I just knew, a few hours ago, the last

peers of narcotic production worldwide and for the first time in many, many years, we got a general decline of production of opium and coca in all the five major producing countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: So how do you account for the fact that on the opening day I think of the Conference, a statement was issued under the – or over the – signatures of very prominent people including the former Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, I believe, Walter Cronkite the television personality, George Soros the multi-billionaire, all of whom were very critical of drug policy. What is it that they feel is so wrong and you feel is okay?

ARLACCHI: I think that people who sign this kind of appeal should reflect a little bit more in-depth, even if they are prominent people, about what they are signing for. The tone of that appeal was absolutely unacceptable. The appeal started over this statement that 'people who fight drugs are more harmful than drugs'. A responsible person should think twice before signing an appeal like this. The Conference has been a big success – all countries agreed on that. We spent a full year preparing this Conference – discussing in-depth – we also have very strong discussions over the different point of view but at the end of the story, we agreed on a strategy which is everything but a prohibitionist strategy. The strategy that we agreed upon is: provide more resources and solidarity to the addicts worldwide, improving dramatically the standard of treatment, prevention and education on drug abuse, on one hand. On the other hand, it is more resources to the peasants who produce currently narcotic drugs, providing them alternative livelihood. In a very short term, this is what we achieved in New York a few months ago and this is remarkable. Then there are people who are saying that we built repressive – ultra-repressive strategy – for the next year or so, that we are going to be tough with the weak part of the drug problem like the peasants or like the addicts. It is exactly the opposite and now I have a lot of good news on the follow-up of the Special Session. We are fully engaged in this good news in terms of concrete plan of action. Next week in Vienna, we will present to the donor countries a very, very detailed set of a business plan to eliminate coca cultivation in the three major Latin American producers. This is our answer and I think this

is the way to show that UN can be very effective.

WILLIAMS: But then you're talking about the world of free markets, as long as the demand is there, people are going to grow it somewhere as a basic crop. I am more concerned about the whole general philosophy. You said it was unacceptable, your term. My father, mother and brother all died of addiction. They died of smoking-related illnesses -- lung cancer -- and when you look around the world, you have a perfectly legal drug which is killing millions of people on an annual basis and the whole effort this bring it an attractive against some narcotic drugs in a sense. Isn't this disproportionate? I mean, in fact, tobacco which is legal and makes millions of billions of profits is perfectly legal, kills people and yet you have another set of drugs which is unacceptable but actually cause less harm medically.

ARLACCHI: You know, it is a question of historically-based strategies. Legal drugs like alcohol and tobacco has different status. Somebody wants to accelerate these status of illegal drugs - it is a matter of discussion of another policies. Until this moment, Member States and also the United Nations agreed to make a distinction on the ways to fight and to reduce demand and supply of these drugs. The discussion is open. I mean we are not thinking that this is the last result. Until this moment there was this idea that alcohol and tobacco affect hundreds of millions of people all over the world are much, much more widespread than cocaine or heroin and countries agreed to curve and to fight or to reduce consumption of these illegal drugs in a certain way. It means developing prevention, developing education, helping people in treatment, a way to quit this habit. Illegal drugs, historically have a different path. Many countries think that illegal drugs are more dangerous not in absolute terms -- because you have named more people that die from alcohol and from tobacco than from heroin or cocaine -- but the number of addicts compared with the number of consumers is quite a different proportion between these two sets of things. This is questionable. But it is not something that could be changed overnight or can be challenged very easily.

WILLIAMS: But isn't there a furlough because the big experiment in criminalizing a substance like this was of course prohibition in the United States. And the argument that

your opponents would make on this is that when alcohol was criminalized, what happened was you immediately got the Al Capones, the Kennedys and similar criminal gangs making a lot of money out of it. And they used that as their furlough to make the points. This is why there are so many people in jail, that more people suffered from the laws than from the substance themselves.

ARLACCHI: The argument of the effect of the prohibition is can be turned or reset because during prohibitionist the number of death for alcohol-related diseases declined dramatically. Organized crime flourished after the repeal of revisionist in many other countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: But flourished during prohibition.

ARLACCHI: Before, during and after the prohibitionist. In many other countries, prohibitionists and organized crime flourished much, much larger than the United States so the argument of prohibitionist can be used both ways and it is not definitely one.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you believe in the idea of legalizing marijuana?

ARLACCHI: No.

WILLIAMS Decriminalizing marijuana?

ARLACCHI: No.

LITTLEJOHNS: Why not – legalizing marijuana?

ARLACCHI: First of all, it is already *de facto* decriminalized and legalized in almost every country of the world. In a very few country, at least in Europe and North America, you have a heavy criminalization in terms of people who go to jail or people who are sentenced to very heavy sentence because of just consuming light drugs like marijuana or cannabis. These drugs are widely available almost everywhere at a reasonable price so the issue of legalizing or decriminalizing is not a very realistic one. The consequences, in our opinion, would be negligible in terms of decrease of consumption, in terms of profits to criminal organization. The consequences will not be what people think.

PISIK: Just getting back to the June Drug Summit again for a minute. You

keep calling it a complete success, but I am really not so sure about that. The way I remember it, it was more like a festival of finger pointing -- the supplying nations and the producing -- the consuming nations -- were all pointing fingers at each other saying 'well that is the reason there is a problem, we have no choice' and everybody was complaining about the countries that are best known for the offshore and the virtual banking centres. I am not sure how you reconcile the speeches that we heard from the podium which were all very generalized support for alleviating the drug problem but nobody said: 'this is what we are going to do; this is how we are taking responsibility for this problem that our nation is contributing'. I am not clear on the success factor of this. What are you taking out of the Drug Conference that you are carrying forward and saying, 'this is new, this is better, this is different'?

ARLACCHI: It was a success because the document that has been agreed upon -- voted for -- were very clear documents, were very clear strategies. Then you have the statement -- the statement of each country and each country has its own perspective and so on. The important term, what does matter for us, is the political declaration that was unanimously voted by all countries and this is a very interesting, concrete and powerful document in which the elements that we spoke before are all present -- elimination of the cultivation, reducing the reduction of demand.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle.** Our guest is Under-Secretary-General Pino Arlacchi, Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention.

PISIK: Sir, your Office has been working with the Taliban for almost two years to try to eradicate poppy production in Afghanistan. Recently, the Taliban have said that despite all of these efforts, they would only agree to eradicate their poppy fields if they could achieve international recognition as a legitimate government. First of all, is that as ridiculous as it sounds and second of all, how do you square that then with something like this International Universal Declaration?

ARLACCHI: I am quite disappointed by the behaviour of Taliban. We did an agreement last year. According to this agreement, they should start to take action on

enforcing the ban of opium cultivation they did in October last year. They did a very, very, very limited delivery of this commitment. They just burned two tons of opium in the month of June this year. On our side, we have to start to provide African peasants resources to cultivate something else – to go back to cultivate wheat and other commodities they did in the past. We did it also in a very limited way, because we have been obliged to withdraw our staff from Afghanistan twice this year – in March and in August. The linkage between the elimination of opium cultivation and the recognition, is absolutely unacceptable. They should eliminate opium poppy cultivation without any condition regardless of the issue on recognition, regardless of any other issue. Poppy cultivation is against international laws, is against Islamic religion, is against their own regulations so they should do it anyway and without asking conditions. Some are putting other elements that are not related to this issue.

PISIK: I am sure they are aware that it is against the rules but at the same time and I think it is pretty clear why. One of the things I am wondering then is what sorts of enforcement mechanisms does your programme have? I mean, you have no army, you have ... what?

ARLACCHI: We have on our side the willingness of the International Community, the strength of the treaties that are assembled most widely signed and agreed and enforcement of the treaties in all the scenario of international treaties. And we have also the strong mandate to protect the human rights – human rights of eight million addicts all over the world. Our strength is this and it is not a military strength, it is not physical strength, but I think that it is very important. Morale authority very often obtain more results than physical constraint or military might.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Arlacchi, an article about you in Time Magazine said: 'Pino Arlacchi is a man with an audacious mission to stamp out all heroin and cocaine production worldwide in ten years'. How much money is it going to take to achieve this aim and how much money have you managed to accumulate for it?

ARLACCHI: We calculate that we need international community and also national governments affected, need around a billion dollars a year for ten years time to eliminate

completely narcotic crops. But what I want to stress is the fact that this is not an idea that came to our mind like this. I did not wake up one day and said, 'oh, now let us eliminate narcotic crop because this is a good idea that can shock people and can have a good effect'. This is what at least three governments of the world are doing actually today and in these years. Bolivia, Peru and Colombia are fully committed on that. Bolivia this year, in just one year, will reduce narcotic crop of 20 percent. Peru reduced, in the last three years, the coca production of 55 percent and in the past, in the last ten years, we, the United Nations, working with the government of Thailand and Pakistan, eliminated completely the opium production in both countries. These are two big success stories.

LITTLEJOHNS: So what financial compensation are these countries obtaining for what they are doing?

ARLACCHI: It was not really a financial compensation. It was alternative development in the sense that we provided the hundreds of thousands of peasants an alternative in terms of crop substitution, sometimes not agricultural solution but also other forms of employment and of livelihood that worked very well when we got the involvement of the peasants. They lived with us – and it was not easy but we got it – and the involvement of governments. When we got that, with very small investment, we did a very big result. In Pakistan, in ten years, investing less than 200 million dollars in ten years, we got a reduction to almost zero of the production of poppy starting from 800 tons – Pakistan was the major producer of opium – now, we are less than 20 tons, almost negligible.

WILLIAMS: Pino, the indigenous people in those countries, in Bolivia and in Peru and Colombia, have used and chewed coca leaves or have made tea with it for centuries. They must look on this pretty much like an Italian peasant being told that his vineyard were being rooted because the world did not like alcohol being made from it. Are you making no provisions for the local culture here because it would be like coming to Britain and telling us we could not drink tea because somebody else did not like it in some ways.

ARLACCHI: It is not exactly the same, anyway.

WILLIAMS: Of course, it is just an analogy.

ARLACCHI: Anyway, in Bolivia you have one area of cultivation which is legal and the chewing of coca and the use of coca tea is not forbidden, it is not illegal. We are not asking to alter deeply-rooted cultural tradition. Coca tea is legal, is good and nobody is particularly worried about it. Our action is about illegal cultivation that sometimes are carried out by the peasants but in Colombia almost half of the cultivation is in the hands of the traffickers. It is carried out under a plantation system. In this case, the answer is eradication and for the farmer component, alternative development. And peasants all over the world now know that. A big progress has been achieved. In the last twenty years everybody is informed of that. I visited the most remote places – the former golden triangle in Afghanistan, and so on. Everybody knows that to grow opium is illegal and it is harmful for the health of many other people and this is helping us a lot for other programme and this is also strengthening our confidence.

PISIK: Getting back to one of my colleague's question, though – this 10 billion dollars that the war on drugs will take, what pledges, what commitments have you lined up from donor countries and the reason I am asking this is because the United States among others have said that they won't be giving extra money to countries that they have traditionally considered not worthy of their aid. For example, the human rights abuses in places like Myanmar. These are the countries that your programme would be concentrating in. Where is the money coming from?

ARLACCHI: Five billion dollars in ten years. And most of this money will be spent by the local governments themselves. Latin American governments pledged and are already spending between 40 and 60 percent of this amount by their own budget. The other half will come from the International Community but a big component will come under the form of international loans and a moderate – a small component – will have the form of grant to these countries under the condition that cultivation will be progressively reduced. On Myanmar and Afghanistan, we think that the success – the target – to eliminate the cultivation requires a change of the political system. We are encouraging dialogue between the government and the democratic opposition in Myanmar and we think that this is the precondition to start any large scale programme. So we are not

conveying -- as somebody incorrectly saying -- conveying big amount of resources to government who violate human rights. This is not our intention. We have a small programme in Myanmar. It is a 16-million dollar programme. It is very, very small in the Wa Region and plus it is important to be there to monitor this cultivation; to start to make the plan for the overall elimination of cultivation for the moment in which, and I am sure that this moment will arrive very soon, political conditions will allow us to work fully with this government and support them with all the amount of resources they want. We are not providing additional resources to governments who violate human rights.

WILLIAMS: You also mentioned human rights and it is quite important. Last year, during the Drugs Conference, the Chinese Government for example issued a pamphlet showing what wonderful work it was doing that had pictures of people being shot in the back of the head for drug trafficking. For example, in the United States, mandatory minimum sentences mean that there are more black people in prison now in the United States than in South Africa at the height of Apartheid. You have almost arbitrary confiscation in many parts of the States. People have their farms taken off them because there was one marijuana plant growing there. It has become almost a revenue raiser. I think what the signatories of that report, the advertisement that you derided earlier, were concerned about that on the name of the war on drugs, there have been gross assaults on human rights across the world. Can you express any concern about this? Do you mandatory minimum sentence work?

ARLACCHI: Yes, I think we are not doing a war on drugs. We do not do war with anything. We are trying to cure a disease and my advice to people who advocate legalization and decriminalization is to be more realistic and to take into account the fact that in 80 percent of the countries of the world, we have a problem of disproportionate sentencing against drug abusers and so on and so forth. I agree with the fact that in many countries, the punishment is excessive and the experience of some countries who are dealing with the problem in a more tolerant way, and these are the countries who are the more successful countries, should be generalized and universalized and this is the real battle that should be done and from my point of view from my observatoire, this is the

most important task for the next years -- to be more tolerant, providing more support to the addicts, being very tough with the traffickers and eliminate cultivation. To thrust all these into political action is a big challenge. And I hope people who have unrealistic target and ideas, people who wants to legalize or decriminalize, and so on, will change their perspective and they will be more helpful to us from this point of view.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Arlacchi, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Under-Secretary-General Pino Arlacchi, Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of *The Nation* and Betsy Pisik of *The Washington Times*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**